

Notes on variant Whitethroats

by R. E. SCOTT and J. G. HARRISON

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Sage (1962) includes the Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* Latham among those species for which albinism has been recorded within the British Isles. Later (Sage, 1963) shows that the seven species of Sylviidae for which he has albinism recorded comprise less than 1% of the total records he had available. Similarly, Glegg (1931) can attribute only one of his 210 Essex records of albinism to the Sylviidae.

During 1964 a total of 543 Whitethroats were trapped at Dungeness Bird Observatory, Romney Marsh, Kent and all examined closely in the hand. Of these only three (or 0.5%) showed any evidence of albinism.

DESCRIPTIONS

A. An adult male trapped on 2nd May, 1964 with an all white terminal band to the tail extending for some 13 mm. from the tip. In all other respects the bird appeared normal. The tail (55.5 mm.) had not completed



Photograph: Pamela Harrison

Whitethroat with white terminal tail band



Photograph: J. Houston

Buff coloured Whitethroat

growth; all twelve feathers were still in sheath at base. Tail lengths of spring male Whitethroats at Dungeness range from 55 to 68.5 mm. and clearly this individual was nearing the completion of its tail growth. All other measurements and weight (14.0 gms. at 0700 hrs. GMT) fell within

the expected range of spring males at Dungeness; the bird apparently being in good health.

It would appear that this could be an example of traumatic albinism in view of the fact that the whole tail was still in growth. Apparently the cause of tail loss had additionally damaged the feather buds of the new growth. The bird was ringed: British Museum N 90234; and it will be interesting in the event of a subsequent capture to know if the tail reverts to normal plumage following the post-nuptial moult.

B. A first-winter bird trapped on 10th August, 1964 with a complete lack of all *black* pigment, resulting in a buff coloured individual, with bill, legs, feet and claws a pale flesh-pink. The eyes appeared the normal dark brown. Harrison (1963) termed this fawn or buff plumage "aneumelanic". In all respects of measurement and weight (15.5 gms. at 1945 hrs. GMT) the bird was within the range expected for the species and was apparently in good health. The bird was ringed: British Museum N 91300 and released, being seen briefly the following day but not subsequently.

C. An apparently normal first-winter bird trapped on 28th August, 1964 was found to have all its claws paler than normal and a total of four completely white. The bird was ringed: British Museum N 91828.

We are most grateful to Dr. P. F. Harrison and Mr. J. Houston for the two photographs.

References:

- Glegg, W. E., 1931. Heterochrosis in Essex birds and their eggs. *Essex Nat.* 23: 171-202
 Harrison, C. J. O., 1963. Grey and fawn variant plumages. *Bird Study* 10: 219-233.
 Sage, B. L. 1962. Albinism and melanism in birds. *Brit. Birds* 55: 201-225.
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The nest and eggs of the Striped Crake, *Porzana marginalis* Hartlaub

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The nest of the Striped Crake is first mentioned by Andersson—*Ortygometra marginalis* (Hartl.), Olive-margined Crake—in *Birds of Damara Land* (1872), pp. 318-320.

In February and March 1867, Andersson at Ondonga, Ovamboland, collected and observed specimens of this rare crake, as well as obtaining eggs—which he describes "of a yellowish ground-colour almost hidden near the thicker end by a broad zone of light brownish red".

Three females were collected, one each respectively on 6th and 23rd February and on 2nd March. Eggs, as described above, and said to be those of the Striped Crake were brought to him (and also a ♀) on 23rd February; their identity was confirmed by Andersson when, on 1st March, he found a nest containing four similar eggs, situated just on the edge of a marsh, in a dryish tuft of grass; the parent, though not secured was several times observed. The next day, 2nd March, another nest (the third) was brought by a native, with the bird which he had captured upon it, and four eggs. On 26th March, an abandoned nest was found with five eggs, far from the water; it had the surrounding grass tied above it, as in the nest of the Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata* Sundevall. I have been unable to establish whether Andersson's eggs are still in existence.